

Summary

This church historical study is an analysis of the origin of the Secession Church (the 'Afgescheiden Gemeente,' also called the 'Christelijk Afgescheidene Gereformeerde Gemeente,' or later, the 'Gereformeerde Kerk') in Amsterdam in the year 1835, against the background of the theological climate in the Dutch Reformed Church (the 'Hervormde Gemeente'). It examines the development of this church community in the first twenty five years of its existence, and the two Amsterdam conflicts (the 'Amsterdamse twisten') that lead to the clash between the founding fathers, Hendrik Peter Scholte (1805-1868) and Simon van Velzen (1809-1896).

1 The theological climate in the Dutch Reformed Church of Amsterdam

In the first half of the 19th century, the Dutch Reformed Church in Amsterdam was, theologically speaking, conservative. There were different reasons for this: 1) A church in Amsterdam was often the climax of a successful minister's career. As a result, there was no influx of younger ministers who were recent graduates from a university and thus familiar with the latest theological opinions; 2) Very few of the ministers in Amsterdam had studied at the University of Groningen, where the most innovative theological faculty at the time was located. They were either educated at the theological faculties of the University of Utrecht (14 pastors) or the University of Leiden (13 pastors); 3) A substantial number of the pastors in Amsterdam (one fourth) adhered to a moderate orthodoxy.

However, the lay preacher ('oefenaar') and elder in the Secession Church of Amsterdam, J.C. Couprie, was correct in claiming that within two decades a change to a new type of preaching and theology had taken place. In the first decades of the 19th century the influence of a so-called 'rational supernaturalism' increased in Amsterdam, and it became the dominant theological orientation in the capital city. It remained so during the first four decades of the 19th century. This study shows how that change came about. A striking leadership role was played by W.A. van Hengel (1779-1871), professor at Leiden, and by H.J. Royaards (1794-1854), professor at Utrecht. These professors were also contributors to the *Christelijk Maandschrift*, a monthly publication of the 27 ministers of Amsterdam in the large 'Hervormde Gemeente' (the Dutch Reformed Church, with 100,000 members, half of the total population of the city). They all belonged to the so-called 'ring Amsterdam,' an association of the Amsterdam pastors.

Both professors adopted the modified theological discourse in the academic world. Van Hengel was inspired by the German theologian F.V. Reinhard (1753-1812), and Royaards was impressed by the Utrecht philosopher Ph.W. van Heusde (1778-1839). Both theologians traveled to Germany, corresponded with their foreign colleagues, and imported new ideas. Another source of inspiration was the Swiss theologian J.J. Hesz (1741-1828). Several of his books were translated by some Dutch Reformed ministers in Amsterdam.

Ministers supporting supernaturalism were convinced that a new, strictly scientific exegesis had proven that the classic Reformed doctrines were speculative and thus were to be regarded as obsolete. At the occasion of his 50th anniversary as a pastor, the Amsterdam minister D.H. Wildschut (1788-1868), said “that by continued study on many points of doctrine a bright light was beginning to shine for him.” According to him, the 19th century had brought about “a second Reformation.” The Dutch Reformed Church needed a new foundation.

The theology of supernaturalism was characterized by its need for compromise. Over against radical Enlightenment philosophers and radical Bible critics in Germany and France, these supernaturalist theologians claimed that the miracles and salvation events recorded in the Bible were historically reliable. At the same time they created their own variant of the optimistic Enlightenment culture: in their view, one day there would be a universal acknowledgement of the superiority of the Christian virtues. Christianity would be able connect with the desire for virtue and love in every person. The power of Christian morality was the command to love even one’s enemies. Humanity could be gradually brought up and educated to achieve an ever greater perfection.

These theologians advocated tolerance in the church, encouraged cooperation with all Protestants, including Anabaptists and Remonstrants. There was quite a difference between the city of Amsterdam and the province of Groningen. In Amsterdam there were no publications influenced by the ‘Groninger Richting,’ which scorned the Reformed confessions. The theology of supernaturalism tried to combine tradition and Enlightenment. The focus was fully on the virtues summed up in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. For example, they said that every human being will eventually reap what he or she has sown on earth.

Within supernaturalism there was hardly any critical reflection about whether these new insights were as objective as they were thought to be. Afterwards it had to be said that they were strongly influenced by the spirit of the Enlightenment, and that sometimes they were highly speculative, as is evident in the philosophy of the Utrecht Professor Van Heusde.

The concept of God’s education and harmonious development of mankind implied tensions with the Reformed doctrines expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt, especially doctrines like the Fall into sin, causing a moral break in human history, and—according to the apostle Paul—evoking God’s wrath. How could one combine the idea of God as a beneficent Father of

all human beings with the Reformed doctrines of the radical depravity of mankind, Original Sin, and God's eternal election (as expressed in the Canons of Dordt)?

In this supernaturalism one could see a reinterpretation of the classical doctrine of regeneration—meaning a work of the Spirit whereby the spiritually dead sinner is brought to life—as a moral improvement of mankind, with God's help. In fact there was no longer a need for the doctrine of free grace—rediscovered by the Reformation of the 16th century. In the magazine *Christelijk Maandschrift* one can read the exclamation: “What an honor it is for mankind that Jesus became man!” This instead of the classic view, which sets forth His humiliation and shame in His incarnation, because of the sin of mankind. The chief point of Jesus dying on the cross was now no longer pardon for sins, but the great moral example of how to be a virtuous person under the most painful circumstances. In supernaturalism moral growth was the result of a human being's own persistent effort, not a gift which Christ earned at the cross and which the Holy Spirit applied to the believer. This made supernaturalism prone to moralism.

Isaac da Costa, messianic Jew and leader of the Amsterdam Réveil, stated in his programmatic *Bezwaren tegen den geest der eeuw* (“Objections to the spirit of the age”) (1823) and following publications, that the dominant theology in the Dutch Reformed Church had exchanged God's wisdom for worldly wisdom. The English Evangelical Anglican minister A.S. Thelwall, living in Amsterdam, accused the Reformed ministers of being murderers of the soul, because they didn't speak about God's judgment when a flood disaster struck Amsterdam in 1825. His plea made a deep impression on the conventicles when it was conveyed to them by the lay preacher Petrus van Veen.

At the conventicles the focus was on true conversion to God as a long process involving many doubts, struggling with the guilt of sin, the fear of misleading oneself, and the hope of finding a gracious God in Jesus Christ. Supernaturalist theologians stood miles apart from this way of thinking. Influenced by Da Costa, Rev. Scholte accused the Dutch Reformed ministers of deception, using old and familiar words like rebirth, faith, and repentance, but filling them with a completely new content. Wormser said that the familiar “sounds were heard externally,” but that they had lost their genuine meaning. This is the background against which the Secession in Amsterdam took place on October 14, 1835.

2 The origin of the Secession Church in Amsterdam

The existing conventicles played a large role in the origin of the Secession Church in Amsterdam. Here lay preachers articulated a spirituality rooted in the 18th century movement of the so-called Further Reformation ('Nadere Reformatie'). Some of the many conventicles in Amsterdam had withdrawn from the supervision of the Dutch Reformed Church at the beginning of the 19th century. The conventicles of Coenraad Deteleff (1766-1841), an old man and former youth teacher in the Dutch Reformed Church, and the younger Harm Hendriks Middel (1802-1882), head of an iron

manufacturing company which fabricated anchors, decided in November, 1835, to leave the Dutch Reformed Church and to join the Secession churches.

Scholte acted as leader and mobilizer of this discontent. Born in Amsterdam, he continued to feel connected to the capital because of his family ties. With impassioned sermons he convinced many that the Dutch Reformed Church was no longer a Church of Christ. He compared this church with a collapsing building: if you want to survive, you had better leave as fast as you can. He connected this image with the Belgic Confession, which speaks of the 'true' and 'false' church (Articles 27-29). In Scholte's eyes the Dutch Reformed Church had become a false church, restoration was impossible, and secession was a divine duty.

This view was not shared by all the conventicles. The orthodox Reformed publisher J.H. den Ouden and the physician and publicist Z.H. van der Feen thought that Scholte was wrongfully putting pressure on people to secede. In their view, a Reformation of the church could only occur in God's timing and could not to be forced by men. Secession should not be seen as an voluntary act of the will. Faithful Reformed members should not give in to an unbiblical consistory (church council) appointed by the Dutch Reformed Church, because the Reformed confessions were still the official papers of this church. This conviction was also held within the circle of the Amsterdam Réveil. That is why most of the orthodox Christians in Amsterdam did not join the Secession Church there.

In admission interviews with potential new members, the church council of the Secession Church tested them regarding their sufficient knowledge of the Reformed doctrines. There was a difference of opinion as to whether an additional testimony was required regarding God's internal work in the soul. The preserved papers regarding the Secession in the archives of the Dutch Reformed Church and the reports of the admission interviews in the Secession Church show what kind of motives played a role in the decision to secede. The optimistic climate of the preaching was particularly mentioned by Seceders as a deformation. Many of them were of the opinion that there was no longer any difference between the preaching of Dutch Reformed ministers and the preaching of their Remonstrant colleagues. The gospel of God's radical grace was no longer heard in the Dutch Reformed Church, they said.

In its first year the Secession Church in Amsterdam consisted almost entirely of people with a pietistic ('bevindelijke') background in the conventicles. We notice a continuity here with the later, introverted phase of the Further Reformation of the 18th century. In the years 1836 and 1837 a different group of novices joined the Secession church. They felt an affinity with the more contemporary, international Réveil movement. These new members were, among others, the lawyer Maurits van Hall, the publisher Henricus Höveker, the bailiff Johan Adam Wormser, and some other friends. They sympathized with the Amsterdam Réveil movement, and they appropriated a wide range of spiritual resources: the 16th century Reformation, the English Puritans, and the early phase of the Further Reformation. This created a new, tense dynamic within the Amsterdam Secession Church.

An analysis of the occupations and addresses, based on the membership registers, shows that the Amsterdam Seceders were found mainly in four concentrations in the city. The largest concentration was in the impoverished neighbourhood called the Jordaan. Another concentration of Seceders was found on the Eastern Islands of Amsterdam, near the harbor with its typical port activity. Furthermore, a striking number of servants were found among the Seceders: for example, housemaids employed by their rich masters in the patrician houses along the canals. However, not all Amsterdam Seceders came from the lowest social class. The influx of people who sympathized with the Réveil raised the social level of the community. Also, the Secession Church counted a significant number of small businessmen such as bakers, grocers, booksellers, paper sellers, and farmers among its members. Scholte's brother-in-law, Jan Daniel Brandt owned a building which was a former sugar factory. Lawyer Van Hall, born into a distinguished patrician family, belonged to the upper class of Amsterdam. Also widow J.J. Zeelt from Baambrugge, the benefactress of Seceders, was a member of the Amsterdam Secession Church. Based on the membership registers, Amsterdam Seceders could be classified as living one of the thirteen districts, to which Marco H.D. van Leeuwen assigned a pauper- and elite-index in his dissertation *Social aid in Amsterdam ca. 1800-1850. Care of the poor as a strategy for management and survival (Bijstand in Amsterdam ca. 1800-1850. Armenzorg als beheersings- en overlevingsstrategie* (Utrecht 1990)). On the basis of this data depicting the professions exercised and the spread of the Seceders in these districts, it can be concluded that the Amsterdam Secession Church formed a fairly broad reflection of the population at that time. The religious and administrative elite hardly noticed this, however. In line with previous studies on the social position of the Seceders, with regard to Amsterdam as well, it is demonstrable that the Secession was not just a matter of the poorest and least developed section of the population.

Based on the specified numbers, at least 522 people left the Dutch Reformed Church in Amsterdam in the period 1835 to 1855. In reality this number was higher, because the Dutch Reformed Church consistory stopped registering the number of Seceders accurately when it became clear that the Secession was past its peak. A notable part of the Amsterdam Seceders (7%) came from the Lutheran Church, where tensions were also rising, as illustrated in the conflict involving H.F. Kohlbrugge. The Secession Church in Amsterdam grew into the largest of the Secession churches in the country in the second half of the 19th century. In the 1850's the number of Seceders increased again. A storm of protest had arisen at the arrival of the liberal minister L.S.P. Meyboom in Amsterdam.

3 The influence of the Further Reformation on the Secession Church in Amsterdam

According to the conversion stories of Middel, published in 1866, en Van Veen, published in about 1864, the conventicles strongly emphasized the pietistic model of conversion. This was a result of the late phase within the Further Reformation. In

order to achieve certainty of personal salvation a system of specific evidences of conversion was developed. The path to conversion was to be characterized by a deep sense of one's own futility and one's deserving of eternal condemnation, experiencing the fear of hell, finally culminating, possibly, in an experience of being virtually present before God's heavenly tribunal (the 'vierschaar-ervaring'), in which the believer received divine acquittal, pledged to him or her in a heavenly court session.

Notable features of this spirituality included throwing lots to make decisions, asking for a divine answer to specific questions from specific Bible verses (for example, which name should be chosen for a baby, or an indication of whom one should marry), sometimes by using the Bible as a direct source of specific revelation. To get a direct divine answer from the Bible, you could randomly open it and where your finger would rest, that word or text would be God's revelation to you. The spirituality of the conventicles reflected the influence of the Medieval bridal mysticism of the late Further Reformation. A religious personal experience became the focus of attention, and assurance of faith was rarely found. Most Seceders reckoned themselves as belonging to the category of those who were 'under conviction of sin' ('bekommerden'). Scholte, Van Hall and Wormser fought against this kind of spirituality. They wanted to link assurance of faith to trust in God's promises.

When citing writers of the Further Reformation it is clear that the group of Scholte, Wormser, and Van Hall mainly relied on authors from the first period: Willem Teellinck (1579-1629), Jacobus Koelman (1632-1695) and Johannes van der Kemp (1664-1718). The theologians of this phase of the Reformation meant to address the entire society with their program of Reformation. This attempt appealed to the Scholte group.

The pietistic part of the church (the conventicles) preferred the authors from the 18th century, with a focus on inward, mystical spirituality: Abraham Hellenbroek (1658-1731), Jacobus Fruytier (1659-1731), Johannes d' Outrein (1662-1722), Johannes Wesselius (1671-1745), Aegidius Francken (1676-1743), Lambrecht Myseras (1676-1740), Johan Verschuier (1680-1737), and Johannes Groenewegen (1709-1764). The preaching of the pietistic minister Dirk Adrianus Detmar (1774-1844) could also count on the approval of the conventicles.

Finally, it is interesting to note that a number of authors of the Further Reformation were appreciated by both parties among the Amsterdam Seceders: Jodocus van Lodenstein (1620-1677), Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711), Bernardus Smijtegelt (1665-1739), Justus Vermeer (1697-1745), Johannes Temmink (1701-1768), Theodorus van der Groe (1705-1784), Alexander Comrie (1706-1774), and Meinardus Meiners (1751-1817). This study provides two explanations for this: Van Lodenstein en À Brakel appealed to both groups as undisputed examples of Reformed orthodoxy. In addition, the group of Scholte, Wormser and Van Hall quoted these authors in their criticism of the abuses at the conventicles, such as assessing each other's state of grace ('genadestaat'). The pietistic part of the community (the conventicles) loved these writers because of their anatomical lessons on the soul, which was dissected in detail in the ongoing conversion process with its ups and downs. Finally, familiarity with Calvin and the Reformation was minimal. Only in the se-

cond half of the 19th century were new editions of Calvin brought to the market by orthodox booksellers like Höveker and Den Ouden. There was a lot of ignorance among the Seceders about the contents of the Reformed confessions. The Secession churches, for example in the person of Scholte, made an important contribution to the orthodox part of the population==also within the Dutch Reformed Church--by publishing new editions of the Reformed confessions.

4 Reactions to the Secession in Amsterdam

4.1 Reaction of the Amsterdam Réveilkring

The decision of the lawyer Maurits van Hall, who belonged to the inner circle of the Amsterdam Réveil, to join the Secession Church, forced other members of the Réveil, especially his friends Da Costa, H.J. Koenen and W. de Clercq to react. All of them belonged to the editorial board of the periodical *Nederlandsche Stemmen over godsdienst, staat-, geschied- en letterkunde* ('Dutch Voices about religion, politics, history, and literature'). A range of theological and social factors caused the majority of the Réveil members not to follow the Secession and break with the Dutch Reformed Church.

In the field of theology the Secession was seen by this latter group as avoidable, because it was a voluntary act. In addition, the Réveil movement had objections to the exclusive claim of the Seceders that they were the legitimate continuation of the Reformed Church in The Netherlands and hence the only 'true church.' The Réveil movement had a pluralistic ecclesiastical character. Also, the Réveil was internationally oriented (to groups in Germany, Switzerland, and France), sought to relate to modern times, and was activist in nature, with a strong social commitment. The pietistic spirituality of the conventicles on the other hand was molded strongly by a form of pietism resulting from the late Further Reformation, characterized by deep uncertainty and an inward-looking attitude. The mainstream of the Secession oriented itself towards the legacy of Dordt and the Further Reformation. Da Costa, however, felt the need for a new confession that would address the liberal modern developments in theology, influenced by the rationalistic Enlightenment.

Finally, the societal gap played a role: the Réveil community was mostly aristocratic in nature and, as such, intertwined with the political and cultural elite at that time. Secession was seen as amounting to rebellion, and in their eyes was a revolutionary deed against the established elite. And the Secession Church was filled with people from the lower social class.

The hard-fought decision of the Van Hall couple to join the Secession shows how big the societal gap was at that time. Being active outside your own social circle was a very challenging and sometimes unpleasant experience.

4.2 Reaction of the Hervormde Gemeente (Reformed Church Amsterdam)

In response to the expanding Secession, the Dutch Reformed pastors of Amsterdam decided together to publish a pastoral letter (*Herderlijke Brief*), in which they warned against the separatists and rejected their accusations. Being pastors of the largest

Reformed community of the country (as has already been noted, 100,000 members), they felt an extra responsibility. They used the same means, a pastoral letter, as was used a century before to criticize the Moravian movement.

It should be noticed that the pastoral letter was signed by all pastors, also by those who were known to be orthodox. It is doubtful whether the letter dissuaded any potential Seceders from making a decision to secede. Many of the orthodox people inside and outside the Dutch Reformed Church criticized the fact that the Dutch Reformed ministers claimed to unanimously agree on all the main points of the Reformed confessions. Wormser left the Dutch Reformed Church as a result of this pastoral letter. As well, conservative members of the Dutch Reformed Church seized the opportunity of the letter from the ministers to make clear that it was irresponsible to attend church services led by these ministers.

4.3 Reaction of the government

That the government treated the church in Amsterdam in a special way is proven by the large amount of records in The Hague archives concerning the Secession in Amsterdam. Actually, the Seceders in Amsterdam played a pivotal role in challenging the government, directed under the King's authority from The Hague, to come to a new policy. In order to counter foreign criticism of the government's policy of hostility to the Secession Church, a plan was made to allow at least one of the Secession churches to exist. The church in the city of Amsterdam was chosen as the starting point. The government was of the opinion that this community was the most likely to meet the requirements of the King. In addition, Amsterdam was an important city, domestically as well as abroad. It was therefore an attractive option to show the good will of the government toward everyone, including the Seceders.

Government policy toward the Secession Church and the Secession churches' responses can be described as follows:

- a period of acquiescence (October, 1835 to February, 1836). The community was small, and there were no military actions from the government against them;
- the second phase lasted from March, 1836 to July, 1836. The *Code Pénal* (a Criminal Code originating from the Napoleonic period) was consistently applied against unauthorized gatherings of Seceders, involving military force;
- the third phase began with the Royal Decree of July 6, 1836 and the authorization granted on this basis by the City Council. Only gradually did the Seceders discover what the consequences of this authorization meant: they were forbidden to hold meetings with an ecclesiastical character. For example: the sacraments were banned. The Amsterdam Seceders declared on March 16, 1837 that they no longer wanted to comply with these conditions, after which the license for worship was withdrawn immediately. The government in The Hague ordered the Amsterdam City Council to put an end to meetings of the Seceders, if necessary by military force;
- the fourth phase lasted from March 16, 1837 to May 28, 1839. It was the most

difficult period for the fast growing congregation. As many as 33 police reports were registered. The Seceders were spared from having their homes occupied by soldiers as a punishment, because the city had sufficient barracks for the soldiers. By paying the fines--at least 2,960 guilders in total-- imprisonment or public sale of property was avoided;

- the fifth phase dawned on May 28, 1839: on that date the Secession Church received royal recognition.

The Amsterdam City Council reluctantly implemented the various orders from The Hague. Amsterdam had a historic reputation of being a safe haven for persecuted religious minorities from abroad. Moreover, many conventicles and religious groups were to be found in Amsterdam, so why should only the members of the Secession Church be persecuted? On top of that was the verdict of the higher Amsterdam Court that criminal prosecution of Seceders could be condemned as contrary to the constitutional freedom of religion. But because the federal government was an absolute monarchy, the City Council had no choice but to observe and carry out royal orders. In the meantime, petitions which Scholte wrote for the Amsterdam Seceders--and thus for all other Secession congregations--remain monumental pleas for the value of religious freedom to our day.

The governmental actions against the Secession Church were limited to being focused on the owners of locations in which illegal church services took place, as well as on those persons who acted as leaders. Beyond that no further actions took place. Höveker was not prosecuted for the printing of publications disagreeable to the King, Van Raalte was not prosecuted when he defied the authority of a police officer, nor was Scholte arrested when he characterized ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church as "lazy shepherds; egotistical, materialistic servants." For a long time the Amsterdam Secession Church was a candidate to be the first to receive royal recognition in The Netherlands. But The Hague still feared possible consequences. Then Scholte, on behalf of the church in Utrecht, met all the requirements unconditionally--including giving up the name Reformed ('gereformeerd'). The Secession Church of Amsterdam took the same course and was allowed to continue with the name the 'Christelijk Afscheidene Gemeente te Amsterdam' ('Christian Secession Congregation of Amsterdam') as the second Secession church in the country on May 28, 1839.

5 The Amsterdam tensions and conflicts

5.1 The first Amsterdam conflict

The first Amsterdam conflict occurred in the period 1837-1842. The source of the conflict was a sermon by Scholte about 'een beetje vleesch' (a bit of flesh, meaning a bit of sin) that cannot undo the work of God. Some pietistic members of the church felt that Scholte underestimated the depth of sin. In their opinion, he was thinking far too lightly about matters of faith and repentance. A closer look at this criticism

shows that it was part of a wider area of tensions. In the periodical *De Reformatie* Scholte, Van Hall and Wormser increasingly chose sides against the prevailing climate in the Secession churches. They criticized its subjective character: cherishing doubt above confidence in God's promises, following divine signs, using words in the Bible without relating them to the context, measuring and weighing each other's state of grace. The articles of Scholte, Van Hall and Wormser were received very critically by the members of the conventicles. Wormser, along with some other supporters, had a strong influence in the Amsterdam consistory. With support from Scholte, the consistory managed to censor some critical church members. As a result, lay preacher and elder Middel left the congregation with a group of about 200 people who supported him.

The opposing parties in this first Amsterdam conflict revealed the position of Van Velzen. In 1839 he would be the first minister of the Secession Church of Amsterdam. He had chosen the side of Middel—the fact that Van Velzen's mother belonged to Middel's supporters was significant. Van Velzen condemned the censorship measures exercised by the consistory on both formal (the classis was not operating at the time) as well as on substantial grounds. In 1842 the Middel group returned to the main congregation, mainly due to the sustained efforts of Van Velzen.

5.2 *The second Amsterdam conflict*

In June 1839 Van Velzen became minister in Amsterdam, this against the wishes of four members of the consistory (namely Wormser, D.A. Budde, Höveker, D. Lijsen). First of all, because they had come to know Van Velzen as their opponent in the first Amsterdam conflict; secondly, because of his authoritarian demand to submit to the Utrecht Church Order (1837). A third reason why they opposed his appointment was the fact that he had independently reinterpreted the call of the Amsterdam congregation (Van Velzen had decided to remain a minister in Friesland as well).

It was clear to all that Van Velzen had accepted the call to Amsterdam in order to counteract Scholte's influence in this central location. Moreover, the pietistic accent in his preaching, focusing on the powerlessness of man, corresponded with the spirituality of the majority of the congregation, but not with the group of Wormser. Tensions escalated when Van Velzen criticized the procedure followed by Scholte in assessing candidates for the ministry.

Scholte decided to proceed with a frontal attack. While Van Velzen was out of town, he read a letter at the Amsterdam consistory on behalf of the consistory of Utrecht. This letter stated that the preaching of Van Velzen was “a skeleton of doctrinal truths,” which lacked the quickening of Christ. Van Velzen, after returning to Amsterdam, demanded a categorical rejection of this criticism from all consistory members. Because Wormser, Höveker and two other officers partly admitted the validity of the criticisms—it is even likely that the criticism mainly came from them—they were immediately suspended from their office.

Soon Wormser and a group of like-minded held their own meetings called the Association ('de Vereeniging'). Scholte preached in these meetings and administered the sacraments. The minister A. Brummelkamp took the initiative to intervene in this crisis situation. He organized a meeting where most ministers of the Secession churches and also many elders from all of the provinces were present. In the end, Brummelkamp pointed to Scholte as the instigator of all the misery. Because Scholte kept denying his role in the conflict, he was finally suspended from his office by the Synod of Amsterdam in 1840. He ended up outside the mainstream of the Secession churches. He continued elsewhere to educate students from Secession churches with the aim of their becoming ministers, especially candidates from Zeeland (that province was not represented at the Amsterdam Synod and rejected the suspension of Scholte). The clash between Scholte and Van Velzen was a low point in the history of the Secession: two men who belonged to the 'fathers of the Secession' regarded each other as being unconverted. Scholte ultimately decided to seek freedom and a new future in Pella (in Iowa, U.S.A.) together with hundreds of followers. Just as he had previously proclaimed that the Dutch Reformed Church could no longer be rescued, he now thought the same about the Secession churches. In his view, as the nation of Israel had been guided by God's command to leave Egypt, now the Seceders had the duty to answer God's call to leave The Netherlands. The separation of the Dutch Reformed Church became a duty to separate from the nation.

This second conflict in Amsterdam can be interpreted in different ways: it can be seen as a clash of characters, as a collision in spirituality, and as a contrast in understanding what secession entailed. These factors are in fact complementary and do not exclude each other. The most decisive factor, in my opinion, is the difference there was in spirituality. Influenced by the Reveil, Scholte argued for bold confidence in God's promises. Such confidence could be offered to every believer, because God's salvation was obtained by means of faith. Scholte fought against the lack of confidence and the emphasis on human impotence to trust in God's promises in conventicle circles. Already Th. van der Groe (1705-1784), whose text *Het zaligmakend geloof* ('Saving faith') Scholte discovered and first published in 1838, emphasized assurance as belonging to the essence of faith. Van Velzen showed, like Hendrik de Cock, more understanding for those who remained skeptical about direct trust in God's salvation acts and promises. As to the structure of the Secession churches, Van Velzen sought close connection to the practices and perspectives of the theologians belonging to the Further Reformation, whom he regarded as being authoritative. Scholte and Van Velzen had, in fact, opposite ideals regarding secession. With their characteristic unwillingness to compromise, tenaciously clinging to their own opinion as the only right one, conflict was inevitable. In this study I advocate a degree of rehabilitation for Scholte, in assessing his views in this period in The Netherlands. In the historical literature concerning this period, for example in the writings of C. Veenhof, Scholte is dismissed as an independent (someone who doesn't want ties with other churches in a federation) and a Labadist (someone who

wants a church of exclusively born-again believers). In this study I provide, I believe, sufficient evidence that Scholte wholeheartedly agreed with Reformed doctrine. Regarding church structure, he chooses--like Van Hall and Wormser--for a congregational model, but certainly not without a federation.

However, in my opinion, Scholte made a mistake with his personal attack on Van Velzen, whom he had first recognized as sharing the same views: for example, both were--contrary to De Cock--against the role of the lay preachers ('oefenaars'). Van Velzen had defended Scholte against De Cock in the case of Scholte's preamble to the Utrecht Church Order 1837.

Scholte's attack of Van Velzen stemmed from his perception that Van Velzen was power-hungry, leading him to change his views in order to achieve his own goals. Scholte seems to be confirmed in this view through his correspondence with Rev. R.W. Duin, who had collided in Friesland with Van Velzen.

6 Building up church life

In this section, a description of church life in the Secession Church focuses on issues surrounding church services (preaching, the sacraments, church weddings, fasting and prayer-days), as well as issues that affected the practice of day to day faith.

Five sermons of Scholte and six of Van Velzen were examined. In their preaching they used a simple classification system, based on the early Further Reformation: the hearers in the congregation were distinguished as those under conviction of sin ('bekommerden'), those with assurance of faith ('verzekerden'), and the unconverted ('onbekeerden'). Each category was addressed separately in the sermon. It is noteworthy that the differences in the preaching of Scholte and van Velzen were significantly less important than both of them seem to feel. Van Velzen, like Scholte, also appeals to God's promises, and encourages a practical Christian life, while Scholte gave attention to the presence of sin and guilt as well.

Concerning Baptism and Lord's supper, the most striking conclusion is that the Secession Church, despite the pietistic background of the conventicles, was not characterized by the phenomenon of the so-called 'avondmaalsmijding' (i.e. avoiding the Lord's Supper). This phenomenon later became typical for some strict Reformed Churches (like the Gereformeerde Gemeenten) in The Netherlands.

The church ceremony for Weddings followed the practice of the historic Reformed Church, and took place during a regular church service. If a minister was not available, an elder would lead the ceremony.

The Seceders joined the tradition, originating in the 16th century, to call for Days of Fasting and Prayer, inspired by the Old Testament. They took place on the following occasions: prior to a Synod, at the occasion of the calling of a pastor, and in the case of serious epidemics threatening the lives of humans or livestock. A day of prayer and fasting was considered to be a 'sabbath,' according to the ministers, so work was banned. The Amsterdam consistory, however, found this not feasible on a weekday: it could get church members in trouble with their employers. In their

view, only the government had authorization to ordain such days and to stop all business and work.

The Amsterdam consistory invested a lot of time and energy in Catechetical instruction, for a variety of different audiences. Older members received lessons as well, since there was very limited knowledge of the Reformed confessions, due to a lack of teaching in the Dutch Reformed Church.

The Seceders dedicated much of their financial resources to their own Christian elementary school ('diaconieschool'). They thought this necessary, because the public school curriculum was based merely on a general belief in God and on leading a virtuous life. Unlike elsewhere, the City Council collaborated wholeheartedly with this effort and provided the appropriate licenses required for the school. There seem to be two reasons for this: firstly, the existence of a Roman Catholic parish school in Amsterdam; secondly, the City Council had always disagreed with the persecution policy of the King and the ministers in The Hague. Now they were provided with an opportunity for doing things their own way, as the municipality was authorized to do so. For many years this Christian elementary school was the only one among the Secession churches.

In Ethics the Dutch Reformed Church and the Secession Church shared some opinions regarding certain subjects: for example, a social conservatism, opposing people who refused to remain in the social position God had supposedly put them in; and a rejection of the 'loose living' excesses connected with attending traveling fairs ('de kermis'). But there were other themes as well, through which the Seceders attempted to show their identity as the true church, over against the Dutch Reformed Church. As 'mark of the true Church' (Belgic Confession, Art. 29) the Seceders were keen to maintain a pure disciplinary practice. They did so mainly by practicing strict Sunday observance. Following the Further Reformation and the Puritans, the Sunday was considered to be a replacement of the Sabbath. The consistory debated often about the question: what is to be considered necessary work for a regular Sunday and what is not? For example, if a mother would have to use a horse and carriage to attend the baptism of her child, some members of the consistory and a part of the congregation preferred her staying at home. The influence of the Further Reformation and the Puritans was also visible in the resistance against everything that had to do with fashion, jewelry, hairstyles and entertainment.

The practiced faith of the Seceders is explored in this study focusing on what was commonly sung in church, that is, predominantly the Psalms (as recommended by Calvin and his followers), and further on how they dealt with the issues of suffering and death. In connection with this, Wormser's reflections on a cholera epidemic showed that he too found it difficult to let go of earthly life and to put his trust completely in God.

The Seceders financed their own Relief for the Poor. In order to be acknowledged by the Crown, they promised never to claim any public funds, in spite of the fact that they even paid taxes to finance churches of other denominations. Needy members who wished to apply for financial aid came to the weekly meetings of the diaconate.

They were asked to explain their request for support. For eligibility, church membership was required. Aid was granted in the case of inadequate income, disability, or illness. In the winter there were significantly more members helped financially than in the summer, due to the harsh weather conditions. The assistance provided had a variety of forms: money, free education, food, clothing, bedding, footwear, peat for heating and cooking, medical care, and providing half the cost of a funeral. Further the diaconate arranged to place the sick and elderly in a special houses for such people. Internal care for orphans was arranged. From 1850 onward the financial situation improved a lot. Plans for a private orphanage were realized in 1864. The revenue sources for the work of the diaconate were the collections in church services and at the houses operated by the church, and further, seats rentals in the church building, gifts, and bequests. Although the community was financially in dire straits until 1850, the diaconate generously helped fellow believers elsewhere if they were affected by calamities.

7 The position of the Secession Church compared to other denominations, and missionary activities

The Secession Church had an isolated position in relation to other churches and groups in Amsterdam. Van Velzen played a major role in establishing this isolation. With his roots in the Dutch Reformed Church, he viewed the Secession Church as the legitimate continuation of the old Dutch Reformed Church. In his view, the Dutch Reformed Church had lost its legitimacy by departing from the Reformed confessions. He stated that Christ had revealed Himself again in the Secession Church, and only there. He even went so far as to claim that before the Secession there was no Church of Christ to be found in The Netherlands. Van Velzen's ecclesiological convictions excluded any cooperation with orthodox kindred spirits outside the Secession Church.

That became clear in relation to the 'Gereformeerde Gemeente onder het Kruis' (the Reformed Church under the Cross) in Amsterdam, which was founded independently of the Secession Church. According to Van Velzen the members of the Reformed Church under the Cross had broken with the true Reformed Church (i.e. the Secession Church) and ought to return immediately. Moreover, their ministers had been ordained illegally, in his view.

Furthermore, Van Velzen could not really appreciate the resurgent orthodoxy in the Dutch Reformed Church of Amsterdam as this became visible in the 'address movement' in the early 1840's. Van Velzen argued consistently: even if some local Dutch Reformed ministers preached biblically, a Dutch Reformed congregation was part of a federation which was led by a corrupt Synod which had abandoned the teaching of the Reformed confessions.

Van Velzen's church vision also led him to condemn other offshoots and independent church plantings, for example the communities that arose around Jan de Liefde and Woutherus Bekker.

The only form of personal contact with non-Seceders he had was with C.H.W. Pauli and C.A.F. Schwartz, two evangelists from England who were sent to Amsterdam for the evangelization of the Jewish people. But this did not result in further cooperation, because Pauli and Schwartz refused to give up cooperation with kindred spirits in the Dutch Reformed Church.

Like the Dutch Reformed Church, the Secession churches were stongly anti-papist. This became evident when the pope seized on the Dutch constitutional separation of church and state in 1848 to attempt to recover the lost Roman Catholic church structures in The Netherlands. As a result, an anti-papist storm raged over the Netherlands in 1853, and an ad hoc coalition was formed of various Protestant denominations in Amsterdam, in which the Seceders wholeheartedly participated as well.

Finally, I describe the results of my investigation as to the extent to which the Amsterdam Seceders made an effort to carry on evangelism and missions. From the 1840's and onward, Amsterdam was full of initiatives in these areas, but initially the Seceders refused invitations to participate in cooperative activities such as joint prayer meetings or collecting money for Bible distribution. Compared to the initiatives by Jan de Liefde and T.M. Looman ('de Verbreiding' (the Spreading (of the Gospel))-- an orthodox group which evangelized within the Dutch Reformed Church), the Secession Church did not make use of the opportunity to spread the Gospel. At his farewell address, Van Velzen stressed above all the unique position of the Secession Church with respect to the other denominations. However, in the late 1850s there were clear signs of a growing missionary awareness.¹

1 Met dank voor de vertaling aan drs. Kim Batteau.